

of revitalization. Because let's remember this: Government programs can sometimes help, but they can't do everything. The 1960s mindset about how to fight poverty needs to change to fit the realities of the 21st century.

I want to share a sentiment I read yesterday from Thomas Vincent, an unemployed coal worker from the very Kentucky county where LBJ launched his big-government blitz 50 years ago. This was his take on the so-called "war on poverty:" What good are all these government programs if they do not get you a job? It is a feeling, the article noted, that is widespread among his neighbors in Martin County.

This is why Republicans say it is time for modernization and new approaches. It is time to give folks such as Thomas real hope. It is time to give them more than just good intentions.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each and with the time equally divided and controlled by the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

The Senator from South Dakota.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss amendment No. 2622 I have filed, the Solutions to Long-Term Unemployment Act, that will be before the Senate today.

The bill before the Senate today would extend emergency unemployment benefits for the 13th time since 2008. Let me repeat that. Congress has enacted or extended emergency unemployment benefits 13 times over the past 5 years. At some point you have to start asking yourself: At what point does this no longer become an emergency but it becomes permanent? We have been doing this now for 5 years. This will be the 13th time.

Obviously, there are lots of people in a tough economy who are still hurting. But what this should say to us is that it is time we started not just treating the symptom but fixing the problem we have in America today. And the problem we have is a sluggish economy that continues to sort of stumble along. We have a chronically high unemployment rate with lots of people who have been unemployed for a very long period of time. Over that same period, Congress has pushed through ObamaCare, raised taxes on job creators, while the admin-

istration has pursued aggressive regulations that have done little more than drive up costs for many of our small businesses.

So after 13 extensions of unemployment benefits, expensive new regulations, and higher taxes, what is the result? Well, today over 37 percent of unemployed Americans have been out of work for 27 weeks or longer. That represents over 4 million men and women who have been most impacted by President Obama's failed economic policies.

I applaud my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle who have offered up commonsense, even bipartisan, ideas to pay for the extension of emergency unemployment benefits. If we extend these benefits once again, I am hopeful we can find an appropriate way to pay for this extension and not pass the bill on to our children and grandchildren. However, I also have to come to the floor today to challenge all of my colleagues to look at solutions to the underlying problem rather than simply treating the symptoms of long-term unemployment for yet the 13th time.

The underlying problem is we have 4 million Americans who have not been able to find jobs for more than 6 months on account of the stagnant Obama economy. That is almost double—the amount of long-term unemployed Americans relative to pre-recession levels. So my amendment addresses the underlying problem of long-term unemployment by reducing labor costs, increasing worker mobility, and strengthening Federal worker training programs.

First, my amendment would provide much-needed relief from ObamaCare for any employer who hires an individual who has been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer. As we all know, ObamaCare is full of additional costs and mandates that are stifling economic growth. The ObamaCare employer mandate arguably has the greatest impact on an already weak labor market. The impact of this mandate is so great the administration has unilaterally delayed it until after the next election. Under this mandate, a business with 50 or more employees must provide government-approved insurance or pay an annual penalty of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per employee. For a smaller or medium-sized business, that is a significant deterrent to expanding and hiring more workers.

Under my amendment, if a business decides to hire someone who has been out of work for 27 weeks or longer, that person would be exempt from the ObamaCare mandate for as long as he or she works at that business.

Second, my amendment would further reduce labor costs by providing a 6-month payroll tax holiday for any employer who hires a long-term unemployed worker. Employers currently pay a payroll tax of 6.2 percent of an employee's wages up to a capped amount known as the Social Security wage base. Waiving this tax is an in-

centive for employers to hire those employees often considered to be a higher risk by virtue of the fact they have been out of the labor force for an extended period of time.

Consider a job that is paying an annual wage of \$40,000. The employer payroll tax holiday in my amendment represents a \$1,240 incentive for the employer to hire a long-term unemployed individual. Or take a higher skilled job paying \$80,000 annually. A payroll tax holiday represents a \$2,480 incentive for the employer to hire someone who has been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer. When coupled with the ObamaCare exemption in my amendment, that is an incentive of roughly \$5,000 to hire an individual who has been unemployed for an extended period of time.

Third, my amendment addresses a fundamental problem facing the long-term unemployed by providing relocation assistance to start a job or find better opportunities.

While the national labor market remains weak, there are pockets of prosperity across the country. In my home State of South Dakota, we have an unemployment rate of 3.6 percent. That is second only to our neighbors in North Dakota who are fully embracing the energy renaissance which is occurring in the Upper Great Plains and other parts of the country. Because of South Dakota's low tax and regulatory framework, it consistently makes us one of the best places in the United States to start and grow a business. In fact, one of the biggest issues we hear from prospective business investors is a concern they are not going to have enough workers if they decide to move to my State.

Meanwhile, we have other parts of the Nation that continue to struggle with persistently high unemployment rates. Virginia has an unemployment rate of 8½ percent, and Rhode Island has 9 percent. The number of job openings and hire rates varies from region to region as well. This past summer the rate of job openings in the South was 20 percent greater than in the Northeast. The same trend exists for hiring rates between those two regions.

Part of a dynamic 21st economy is ensuring a mobile workforce that can meet regional demands for good-paying jobs. However, if you have someone who has been living off of unemployment benefits for the past 6 months, that person likely does not have the resources to move to a new State for a new job.

My amendment would provide a low-interest loan of up to \$10,000 for anyone willing to relocate to a new job or move to a new State with better employment opportunities. These loans would have to be repaid within 10 years, but no payments would be required for 1 year while that individual or family gets back on their feet. Additionally, if the new job is eliminated within that first year, through no fault of the employee, the loan could be forgiven.